

George Smitherman on Cannabis in Canada

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If you believe Justin Trudeau sold [cannabis](#) in Canada out to a Laurentian Elite, then George Smitherman is your boogeyman.

A former politician and now licensed producer, he's also President and CEO Cannabis Council of Canada ([C3](#)).

When the Trudeau government announced a review of the Cannabis Act, [C3 released](#) "Five Big Asks."

They are:

1. Address the financial viability of Licence holders by fixing the excise tax, provincial distributor mark-ups and fees.
2. Level the playing field with the illicit market.
3. Allow Licence holders to communicate with consumers, including about the effects of cannabis.
4. Eliminate costly "red tape" and unnecessary "Nanny State" regulations.
5. Strengthen patient access to [medical cannabis](#).

Except for #2, these are all reasonable asks.

But what about #2?

What does "level the playing field" mean? I asked George Smitherman this, and here's what he said.

George Smitherman on "Levelling the Playing Field" with Illicit Cannabis

Just when you think Justin's Liberals couldn't be any more incompetent, you discover new depths.

The [C3](#) doesn't like [illegal cannabis](#) stores in the GTA for obvious reasons. They're also not big fans of illicit online sales and delivery.

Their call for more enforcement is entirely logical from their viewpoint.

"I can't use a website," George tells me over the phone, "If I'm in the licensed industry, I can't sell my weed for delivery across the country via website."

Why aren't the [police](#) doing something? They are, as you can tell from the headlines. [Police](#) tend to go after the source, not the retailer.

But George's problem is that he's got bureaucrats breathing down his neck (although he didn't use such blunt language).

"We're playing by the rules," George Smitherman says. "We're paying all the fees. And it's expensive, it's not cheap."

The problem is the Cannabis Act isn't worth the trouble. Get licensed, and you're regulated to death by public health busybodies. "The regulators and the lawmakers have nothing but attention for you," says

George.

Or don't get licensed and risk fines and imprisonment. And since the legacy cannabis market has an extensive history with the latter option...

George on BC Bud

George Smitherman agreed that the federal government could displace the cannabis [black market](#). If they addressed #1 and #3 of the "Big Five Asks" (dialing down the taxes and regulations).

Our disagreement was on what that would entail.

I am undoubtedly part of the "regulatory liberationists," who would like to see a commercial [cannabis industry](#).

George Smitherman is "practical" and wants incremental steps to balance public health with a profitable cannabis sector.

Nevertheless, [Health Canada](#) has made it clear it thinks its micro-licensing scheme is the proper path forward for [BC Bud](#).

[C3](#) agrees, "We believe that the amount of growing space for micros needs to be increased," says George.

And while he does try to be mindful of the different cannabis cultures, especially on the West Coast, George ultimately says he doesn't think the [grey](#) market exists.

"I think that's just fuzzy branding," he says.

It's one thing to be a small mom-and-pop farm, but not going through the legal means becomes a problem at some point.

Ultimately, it's a disagreement over testing and safety. As evidenced by some impure cannabis from illicit markets, it seems restrictive regulations are better than no regulations.

And not doubt a lot of [Ontario](#)'s black market weed sucks.

But in [British Columbia](#)? Especially in the smaller connoisseur market? The lack of regulations has created a culture of customary rules. And this cannabis tests just fine with or without Ottawa's bureaucracy.

George on the "Nanny State" Cannabis Regulations

What does that mean when George Smitherman and the [C3](#) ask the government to eliminate costly red tape and unnecessary Nanny State cannabis regulations?

George Smitherman is admittedly "motivated" by the public health goals of the Cannabis Act. Removing Nanny State regulations is about increasing the [THC](#) limits on [edibles](#).

"It's missing the mark for the regular consumer of [cannabis edibles](#)," says George. If the government is serious about displacing the black market, "they need to raise the edible limit."

But as for delegating production licenses to the provinces? George isn't aware of any movement to make this happen. He is critical of the idea we need to start over again with less focus on public health.

"Obviously that's not the approach of the Cannabis Act, but I definitely get where those arguments are coming from."

George Smitherman on the Cannabis Act Review

What does George Smitherman think of the [Cannabis Act review](#)? The same thing we're all thinking: hurry up!

We agreed that small producers and manufacturers [suffer](#) under excise taxes and prohibitive regulations.

Won't they be bankrupt by the time this cannabis review wraps up?

"Cynically, I might say, anything that starts late is in a bad spot," he says. "If 18 months of a report results in that report being sent somewhere else for consideration, that's not a formula for the timely response that the sector needs."

We can agree on urgency. And both George and I are pleased to see the review board will at least listen to consumers and the industry rather than narrowly define the scope of its mandate.

In Summary

[Justin Trudeau](#) promised to license, restrict, and regulate cannabis. His government managed to license it. They certainly regulate it to death.

But restrict? That was always an impossible feat. You can't dictate consumer demand.

This Liberal government isn't likely to remove cannabis regulatory gatekeepers. Therefore, the illicit market will likely have no incentive to join the legal regime.

And so guys like George Smitherman and the [C3](#) will continue to call for greater cannabis enforcement.

In the words of Ringo Starr, "Everything government touches turns to crap."